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Federal Budget Submission: National Gambling Prevention Program for Young Australians

January 27, 2026

Protecting the Next Generation

A National Gambling Prevention Program for Young Australians

Executive Summary & Funding Request

The OurFutures Institute seeks **$20 million over four years (2026–27 to 2029–30)** to develop and deliver Australia's first national, evidence-based gambling prevention education program for young people aged 15 to 20.

Gambling harm in Australia is increasingly driven by early exposure through digital betting, gaming features, and pervasive advertising, with participation

led by the Department of Social Services and delivered nationally across secondary schools, TAFEs and universities.

Building on the proven OurFutures digital prevention model, which has already reached more than 1,000 schools nationwide, the program will equip young Australians with the skills to recognise gambling risks, resist harmful design and marketing practices, and make informed decisions before gambling behaviours become entrenched.

This proposal represents a cost-effective, demand-reduction investment that complements regulatory reform by addressing gambling harm before behaviours become entrenched. By intervening at the highest-risk transition point (ages 15–20), the program is expected to reduce future demand on mental health services, income support and crisis interventions, improving the return on investment of broader gambling reforms.

Policy Context & Murphy Report

In June 2023, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, delivered its landmark report *You Win Some, You Lose More*. The report was a unanimous, bipartisan call for the creation of a comprehensive national strategy on online gambling harm reduction, led by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and supported by public-education campaigns and evidence-based programs for children, young people, and families.

By funding the development and implementation of the OurFutures Gambling Prevention Program, the Department of Social Services can immediately operationalise this prevention vision- creating Australia's first national, evidence-based gambling-education initiative for schools, TAFEs and universities. Together, these elements make the proposed program a turnkey, research-driven solution that translates the Murphy Report's prevention recommendations into tangible national action.

Public-Education Campaign *Recommends government-funded education targeting young people, parents and caregivers, and resources for schools and universities.*	resources and community toolkits that directly meet the brief, countering misconceptions and gambling normalisation in sport, advertising and gaming.
Recommendations 5 & 9 – Independent Research and Best-Practice Interventions *Urges investment in independent research and evidence-based programs to guide national policy.*	The OurFutures program will be co-designed and evaluated with the University of Sydney's Matilda Centre, ensuring robust clinical trials, longitudinal data collection, and evidence translation to guide DSS policy and future national harm-reduction strategies.
Recommendations 27–30 – Education on Simulated Gambling and Gaming Features *Warns of harms from loot boxes and gambling-style gaming, calling for youth education.*	Will incorporate dedicated content on digital gambling risks, including gaming, loot boxes and inducements, addressing emerging harms identified by the Inquiry. It will also include content on advertising and influencer-driven gambling promotion, predatory design in digital gaming environments, and emerging online pathways to harm such as crypto-based wagering and offshore betting platforms.

This proposal provides a direct mechanism to operationalise the Murphy Report's prevention vision by establishing a national, evidence-based youth gambling education program that strengthens harm-prevention capability across schools, TAFEs and universities. As regulatory reforms to gambling advertising and inducements are progressively implemented, a national prevention education program provides the necessary demand-reduction complement to ensure these reforms translate into real-world harm reduction.

Lead Agency and Governance

Consistent with the Murphy Report's recommendation for a nationally coordinated prevention response, this initiative is proposed to be led by the Department of Social Services. DSS is uniquely positioned to support the proposal's focus on delivery across schools, tertiary institutions, vocational settings, sporting organisations and community partners, and to integrate

one that increasingly begins in adolescence. **Australians lose an estimated $25–32 billion each year to gambling, the highest per-capita losses in the world**[1]. National data show that overall gambling participation has risen steadily in recent years, with online wagering expanding most sharply among 18–24-year-olds[2]. Among young people, gambling begins early and accelerates rapidly: 16% of 16–17-year-olds gamble, rising to 46% among 18–19-year-olds, and average annual losses increase twenty-seven-fold from $30 to $812 per person within just two years[2]. This sudden escalation marks the critical 18–20-year-old gateway, when legal access, digital familiarity and aggressive industry marketing converge to establish lifelong behavioural patterns.

This escalation is fuelled by **years of exposure before legal age through gaming, family habits, sports-betting culture and pervasive marketing**. Over one-third of adolescents purchase loot boxes, 32% play games containing gambling-like features, and 26% engage in social-casino apps, all of which replicate the same reward cycles used in electronic gaming machines[3]. Combined with peer influence and the adolescent brain's heightened sensitivity to reward, these experiences create a powerful gateway effect. By 18, gambling already feels familiar, socially accepted and largely without consequence. As a result, parents, educators and community organisations are increasingly calling for proactive support, as gambling marketing, gaming mechanics and digital-first betting platforms reach young people at scale.

Young men are disproportionately affected by gambling-related harm, with higher rates of participation, greater financial losses, and elevated risk of severe mental health outcomes, including suicide. The **late adolescent and early adulthood period represents a critical window for prevention, particularly for boys and young men,** as gambling behaviours accelerate rapidly once legal access is gained. Targeting this developmental stage through universal education delivered in schools, TAFEs and universities provides the most effective opportunity to prevent gambling behaviours from becoming entrenched and to reduce long-term harm among this high-risk group.

About the OurFutures Gambling Prevention Program

Gambling harm is increasingly driven by digital environments, gaming-adjacent mechanics, influencer culture and offshore betting markets. This program responds to these emerging risk pathways by **building digital literacy, critical thinking and real-world decision-making skills, ensuring young Australians can navigate modern gambling and gaming ecosystems safely.**

The OurFutures Gambling Prevention Program will be a federally funded, curriculum-aligned digital education initiative designed to build digital literacy and reduce gambling uptake among young Australians. It will target secondary students in Years 9–12 and young adults aged 18–20 in TAFE, university, apprenticeship settings and sporting clubs, addressing the key developmental window when gambling behaviours typically begin. A dedicated consultation and co-design phase with young people, educators, and gambling research and awareness experts will be a key building block of the program. This process will ensure the program reflects young people's lived experiences, aligns with school contexts, and is grounded in the latest evidence on gambling harm prevention.

Delivered through OurFutures' interactive online platform, the program will comprise short, evidence-based lessons co-designed with young people, educators, and gambling research and awareness experts. These will be supported by teacher implementation resources and parent/carer information materials to reinforce consistent prevention messaging across the whole school community.

The program will build young people's skills to recognise and navigate digital environments where gambling and gambling-adjacent behaviours are promoted and normalised. Key focus areas will include:

- Identifying early signs of harm and knowing when and how to seek help
- Developing refusal skills and strategies to support peers
- Understanding how gambling and gaming companies design products to drive engagement and spending
- Identifying and challenging misleading advertising, influencer promotion and inducements
- Recognising predatory design mechanics and feedback loops in gaming (e.g. loot boxes, pay-to-win systems, variable reward structures)
- Understanding "digital dark nudges" that steer young people toward betting, gaming and in-app purchasing

We will also work with sporting organisations and youth-facing partners to support dissemination and engagement among young people involved in sport, who are disproportionately targeted by gambling advertising. Through this approach, the program will equip students with practical skills to navigate online environments safely, challenge the normalisation of gambling in sport and gaming, and make informed decisions.

Our Track Record- Proven Prevention at Scale

OurFutures Institute is an Australian not-for-profit organisation which develops and delivers digital, evidence-based prevention education programs that address key health issues affecting young people, including substance use and mental health. OurFutures Institute programs are built on more than 15 years of research led by the University of Sydney's Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, and have been evaluated through multiple randomised controlled trials.

In response to rising youth vaping, The University of Sydney's Matilda Centre created the OurFutures Vaping Prevention Program, the world's first evidence-based digital program designed to prevent e-cigarette use among adolescents. A randomised controlled trial of more than 5,000 students, published in *The Lancet Public Health (2025)*, **found that students who completed the program were 65**

This rapid uptake illustrates OurFutures' capacity to translate public investment into real-world implementation and dissemination at scale across Australia's fragmented, state-specific education landscape. It also demonstrates how curriculum-based digital prevention programs can work alongside regulatory approaches by addressing demand-side drivers of harm, while legislation targets supply.

The Our Futures Gambling Prevention program will be developed in partnership with three specialist research groups at the University of Sydney:

- **The Matilda Centre**, led by Professor Maree Teesson, will lead co-design and prevention education development, ensuring the program builds on world-leading evidence in youth prevention and school-based digital delivery.
- **The Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic** within the Brain and Mind Centre, led by Professor Sally Gainsbury, will contribute expertise in gambling behaviour, harm reduction and cessation support.
- **The Games and Play Lab**, led by Professor Marcus Carter, will guide content on gaming, digital design, and predatory mechanics that expose young people to gambling-like environments.

This interdisciplinary partnership reflects the increasing overlap between gambling, gaming, and digital environments, and ensures the program addresses the full ecosystem shaping young people's risk. Together with OurFutures Institute, this collaboration will ensure the program is grounded in best-practice prevention science, informed by specialist expertise in gambling and gaming harms, and tested through rigorous evaluation.

OurFutures Institute has established itself as a national leader in translating research into practical prevention programs that reach schools quickly and achieve measurable public-health outcomes. The success of the Vaping Prevention program demonstrates OurFutures' capability to translate emerging public-health priorities into digital behaviour-change programs delivered at

prevention education program leveraging our proven online and scalable OurFutures infrastructure, and long-standing relationships with the education sector. Key prevention programs covering knowledge, misconceptions, harm minimisation, refusal skills and cessation, will be developed and delivered to three groups: Years 9/10 students, Years 11/12 students and 18-20 year olds. Supplementary resources and information toolkits to be distributed to teachers, parents, community and industry bodies

Years 1–2: Development and Early Dissemination. Co-design and content/resource development, creation of digital lessons, teacher and parent/carer resources, information campaigns and cessation resources, and clinical trials. Building engagement and dissemination capability across all education sectors, and providing early access.

Years 3–4: National Dissemination. Programs will be scaled nationally through existing OurFutures channels, supported by professional learning, communications, and sector partnerships to ensure broad and equitable reach.

Activities and Timing	FY 26/27	FY 27/28	FY 28/29	FY 29/30
Research, Co-design, Build multiple programs (years 9/10, 11/12, and for 18/19 year olds) and supplementary resources and clinical trials	$2,500,000	$2,500,000	$500,000	$500,000
Engagement, Integration and Dissemination to multiple systems (high schools, RTOs, Tertiary, Apprentices)	$2,000,000	$2,000,000	$3,500,000	$3,500,000
Project Management and overheads	$1,000,000	$1,000,000	$1,000,000	$1,000,000
Total	**$5,500,000**	**$4,500,000**	**$5,000,000**	**$5,000,000**
Total over four years				**$20,000,000**

Cost Effective, Demand Reduction Investment

While regulatory reforms address exposure and supply, prevention education reduces demand by shaping behaviour before harm occurs. Evidence indicates

leveraging a fully digital delivery model to achieve scale at low marginal cost. Based on OurFutures Institute's experience delivering the federally funded vaping prevention program, this level of investment enables rapid national rollout, high participation rates, and consistent quality across education sectors without ongoing infrastructure expenditure. By intervening early, before gambling behaviours become established, the program aims to reduce long-term costs associated with financial distress, mental ill-health and help-seeking services. Digital delivery ensures equitable access for metropolitan, regional and remote communities, while allowing continuous improvement through evaluation and refinement over the life of the program.

Cost Effective, Demand Reduction Investment

While regulatory reforms address exposure and supply, prevention education reduces demand by shaping behaviour before harm occurs. Evidence indicates that once gambling behaviours are established in late adolescence, intervention becomes more costly and less effective. As a result, early prevention materially improves the fiscal return of regulatory and treatment investments already underway.

This proposal represents a cost-effective national prevention investment, leveraging a fully digital delivery model to achieve scale at low marginal cost. Based on OurFutures Institute's experience delivering the federally funded vaping prevention program, this level of investment enables rapid national rollout, high participation rates, and consistent quality across education sectors without ongoing infrastructure expenditure. By intervening early, before gambling behaviours become established, the program aims to reduce long-term costs associated with financial distress, mental ill-health and help-seeking services. Digital delivery ensures equitable access for metropolitan, regional and remote communities, while allowing continuous improvement through evaluation and refinement over the life of the program.

Ken Wallace: CEO- OurFutures Institute

Ken Wallace has twenty years experience in technology organisations with a passion for and focus on Education Technology and e-learning. He was co-founder, CEO and chair of Educator Impact. He has held senior executive roles including COO at kidsbook.io and CTO at Emagine International. He has been a board member (and treasurer) for Not For Profit advocacy group Jubilee Australia Research Centre. He is currently a non-executive director of NFP Together4Youth and is on the advisory board of Medtech start-up Cordifio.

Anthea Jirgens: Head of Partnerships & Engagement- OurFutures Institute

Anthea is a national leader in education and public health engagement, with a proven track record in forging partnerships to achieve large-scale implementation of prevention education initiatives. Known for her strategic focus and impact-driven leadership, she led the largest rollout of community suicide intervention training globally through funding from the NSW Ministry of Health and has presented on best-practice prevention education at the United Nations. Anthea has extensive experience working within tertiary education institutions to secure uptake of prevention programs- including universities, private colleges and TAFEs- and currently leads stakeholder mobilisation for OurFutures Vaping.

Professor Maree Teesson: Director- Matilda Centre/ Director- OurFutures Institute

Professor Maree Teesson AC is Co-founder and Director of OurFutures Institute, Director of the Matilda Centre and Director of the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use (PREMISE) at the University of Sydney. Maree is Chair of Australia's Mental Health Think Tank and Chair of the Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission Expert Advisory Panel. Maree is a Former National Mental Health Commissioner (2018-2021). Maree is nationally and internationally renowned for her research on the comorbidity between mental health and substance use disorders. Recently

is an NHMRC Career Development Fellow and Director of Prevention at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney. She is also Prevention Lead at the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use (PREMISE) and Vice-president for the Alliance for the Prevention of Mental Disorders.

Associate Professor Louise Thornton: Program Lead for Digital Interventions- Matilda Centre

Dr Louise Thorton is Program Lead for Digital Interventions and Engagement at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, and Deputy Director of the Hunter Medical Research Institute's Healthy Minds research program. Dr Thornton spearheads a cutting-edge research program focused on harnessing digital technologies to reduce chronic disease risk and improve mental health outcomes among young people and individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Dr Thornton is an internationally recognised leader in digital health, serving on the Board of Directors and as Treasurer for the International Society for Research on Internet Interventions (ISRII), and on the executive of Australia's Society for Mental Health Research (SMHR).

Professor Sally Gainsbury: Director- Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic, Brain and Mind Center

Sally Gainsbury is a recognised world leader in the prevention of gambling harms. She is Director of Australia's only university-based gambling treatment clinic and has published over 150 peer-review publications which have been cited over 12,000 times in academic and policy documents. Professor Gainsbury has been invited to provide expert advice to policy makers and regulators in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Singapore, and the UK and has given keynote presentations in 17 countries. Her research focuses on understanding the impact of technology on gambling harms including the development and effectiveness of digital interventions.

ethical implications of emerging technologies. He is currently director of the Sydney Games and Play Lab and a former President of the Digital Games Research Association of Australia.

Conclusion

The OurFutures Gambling Prevention Program offers the Department of Social Services a timely, evidence-based and highly visible opportunity to deliver on the Murphy Report's prevention vision. It represents a cornerstone policy response that demonstrates federal leadership, responds directly to community concern, and delivers measurable national benefit.

Seven reasons this initiative represents a transformative government response:

1. **Addresses a national public health priority.** Gambling participation among young Australians is rising sharply, with almost half of 18–19 year olds already gambling. This program provides a direct, targeted intervention to reverse that trend.
2. **Proven model with high likelihood of success.** The program will be co-designed with educators, students and young people, using a methodology that has been rigorously tested across a decade of clinical trials and demonstrated significant behaviour change in schools nationwide.
3. **Meets strong community demand.** Parents, teachers and wellbeing leaders are calling for prevention education to address the rapid growth of youth gambling and its mental health impacts.
4. **Delivers equitable national reach.** A federally funded rollout would ensure all schools, TAFEs and universities have access to the program, removing purchasing barriers and guaranteeing consistent prevention coverage across sectors.
5. **Directly improve outcomes for men and boys.** By intervening before and during the 18–20 transition period, the program addresses the highest-risk group for gambling uptake, loss and long-term harm.

7. **Positive national narrative.** This initiative allows the Government to demonstrate decisive leadership on an issue of growing national concern, showing responsiveness to the Murphy Report and to the voices of parents, teachers and health professionals.

This would give the government a clear, early and highly visible prevention outcome to accompany broader regulatory reforms, demonstrating responsiveness to the Murphy Report and strong leadership on youth wellbeing. Through this initiative, the Department of Social Services can take **visible, immediate action to protect young Australians from gambling harm, deliver on national prevention priorities, and establish Australia as a global leader in early intervention.**

Contact

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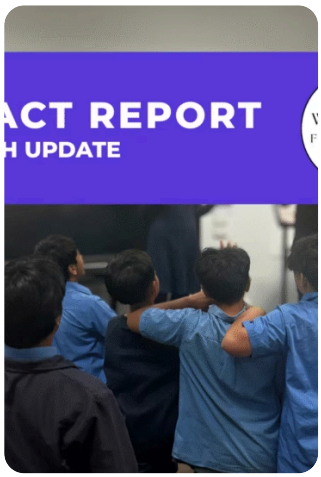

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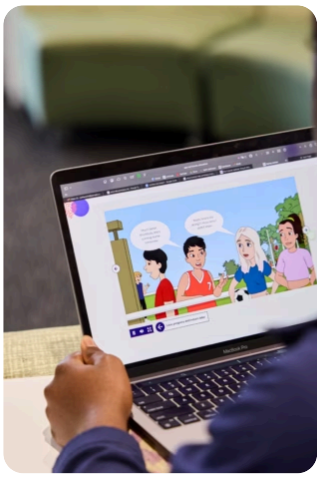

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